

Message Text

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USUN NEW YORK 027

C O N F I D E N T I A L DAMASCUS 0361

BEIRUT PASS BAGHDAD

KUWAIT PASS MUSCAT

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GENEVA FOR MEPC DEL

EO 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, SY

SUBJECT: PRESIDENT ASAD'S APRIL 7 SPEECH AND TENSION ON
THE GOLAN

REF: DAMASCUS 0359

1. SUMMARY: PRESIDENT ASAD'S APRIL 7 SPEECH BROKE NO NEW GROUND BUT REITERATED SYRIAN DEMANDS FOR A COMPLETE ISRAELI WITHDRAWAL FROM THE TERRITORY OCCUPIED IN 1967 AND RECOGNITION OF PALESTINIAN RIGHTS. HE INDICATED THAT BOTH POLITICAL AND MILITARY MEANS WOULD BE PURSUED BY SYRIA TO ACHIEVE A JUST SOLUTION. MOST OBSERVERS HERE DESCRIBE THE SPEECH AS MODERATE. MEANWHILE BECAUSE OF INCREASING TENSION ON THE GOLAN THERE ARE SOME LOCAL FEARS THAT THE MILITARY SITUATION MAY GET OUT OF HAND IN THAT AREA. DIPLOMATIC OBSERVERS, HOWEVER, BELIEVE THAT THE TENSION ON THE GOLAN IS CONTROLLED, ALBEIT INCREASING, BUT SOME ARE EXPRESSING DOUBT AS TO THE EFFECT OF ISRAELI POLITICAL INSTABILITY ON THE GOLAN SITUATION.

2. BY REFTTEL WE HAVE TRANSMITTED A FREE, INFORMAL TRANSLATION OF PRESIDENT ASAD'S APRIL 7 SPEECH ON THE OCCASION OF THE 27TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE BAATH PARTY. AS NOTED, THE SPEECH WAS UNSCHEDULED, EXTEMPORANEOUS AND RATHER SHORT. IN IT HE MADE NO NEW POINTS BUT IN A FIRM AND CLEAR MANNER INDICATED THAT WHILE SYRIA CONTINUES READY TO WORK FOR A POLITICAL SOLUTION TO THE ARAB-ISRAELI PROBLEM, RECOURSE TO ARMS SHOULD NOT BE RULED OUT IF JUSTICE FOR THE ARABS AND FOR THE PALESTINIANS IS NOT ACHIEVED. HE EMPHASIZED THAT SYRIA UNLIKE SOME OTHERS (SOME SEE THIS AS A SNIDE DIG AT SADAT) IS NOT PREPARED TO SURRENDER TO ACHIEVE A "JUST SOLUTION." HE REPEATED AS HE HAS IN THE PAST THAT JUSTICE MEANS COMPLETE ISRAELI WITHDRAWAL FROM THE TERRITORY OCCUPIED IN 1967 AND RECOGNITION OF PALESTINIAN RIGHTS.

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3. DESPITE BEIRUT NEWSPAPER AND OTHER COMMENTARY TO THE CONTRARY, I DO NOT FIND THE SPEECH BELLICOSE OR EXTREMIST, PARTICULARLY WHEN ONE CONSIDERS THAT WHILE HE WAS SPEAKING THE SOUNDS OF ARTILLERY EXCHANGES ON GOLAN COULD CLEARLY BE HEARD IN THE CITY. NEITHER IS IT BEING SO INTERPRETED HERE IN DAMASCUS. IF ANYTHING THE PRESIDENT'S ACKNOWLEDGEMENT THAT THERE ARE BOTH DIPLOMATIC AND MILITARY MEANS TO ACHIEVE A "JUST"

SOLUTION TO THE ARAB-ISRAELI PROBLEM IS BEING CITED HERE AS PROOF OF PRESIDENT ASAD'S CONTINUED PRAGMATISM. IN ADDITION PEOPLE HAVE NOTED HIS ADVICE TO THE ARABS ABOUT BEING "ALERT TO THE APPROPRIATE ACTION" FOR THE "APPROPRIATE TIME" AND ABOUT NOT LOSING "THE APPROPRIATE OPPORTUNITY." THIS IS BEING INTERPRETED AS AN OBLIQUE BUT CLEARLY UNDERSTOOD HINT THAT SYRIA WILL CONTINUE TO BE FLEXIBLE, DESPITE INTERNAL OR EXTERNAL PRESSURES TO THE CONTRARY.

4. WHAT IS CAUSING MORE CONCERN IN THE CITY IS NOT THE PRESIDENT'S SPEECH BUT THE CONTINUED TENSION ON THE GOLAN WITH THE SOUNDS OF INCREASED SHELLING BEING AUDIBLE HERE OVER THE LAST TWO DAYS AND NIGHTS. THERE IS CURRENTLY A RUMOR MAKING THE ROUNDS THAT THE SYRIANS HAVE MANAGED TO CAPTURE AN ISRAELI OUTPOST ON MT. HERMON, WHICH THE ISRAELIS ARE NOW ATTEMPTING TO RECAPTURE. AS A RESULT SOME PERSONS ARE EXPRESSING CONCERN THAT THE SITUATION ON THE GOLAN MAY GET OUT OF HAND OVER THE NEXT FEW DAYS, AND FOR THE FIRST TIME SINCE MY ARRIVAL IN JANUARY SOME PERSONS ARE OPENLY FEARFUL ABOUT THE POSSIBILITY OF THE RESUMPTION OF FULL-SCALE HOSTILITIES. MEANWHILE, OTHERS TAKE COMFORT FROM THE FACT THAT SYRIA IS SENDING ITS MISSION TO WASHINGTON THIS WEEK ON SCHEDULE AND THEY HOPE THAT THE PATTERN FOLLOWED DURING THE SINAI DISCUSSIONS WILL ALSO BE PURSUED FOR THE GOLAN AND THAT DISENGAGEMENT IS NOW ONLY A MATTER OF WEEKS. IT IS ALSO BEING NOTED THAT SEVERAL FOREIGN NEWSMEN HAVE RECENTLY ARRIVED IN THE CITY PRESUMABLY ON THE TRAIL FOR A HOT STORY. THIS, TOO, IS HAVING A BIT OF AN UNNERVING AFFECT.

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5. MEANWHILE, MOST DIPLOMATIC OBSERVERS HERE CONTINUE TO BELIEVE THAT THE SOUND AND FURY COMING FROM THE GOLAN SIGNIFIES NOTHING MORE THAN THE NECESSARY BACKGROUND MUSIC TO ENABLE THE SECRETARY TO PULL OFF AGAIN WHAT ONE COLLEAGUE CALLED "HIS FAMOUS MAGIC ACT." THE ONLY DOUBT, HOWEVER, IN THE MINDS OF SOME OF MY DIPLOMATIC BROTHERS IS TO WHAT EXTENT THE CURRENT POLITICAL INSTABILITY IN ISRAEL MAY ADVERSELY EFFECT WHAT APPEARS TO THEM TO BE THE CONTROLLED, ALBEIT INCREASING, TENSION ON THE GOLAN.
SCOTES

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